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ABSTRACT

The newsletter for parents of handicapped children focuses on summer activities which provide fun and learning without undue expense or effort. Suggestions include encouraging reading activities (including visiting the library, reading out loud, selective television viewing, making a book, and writing letters). Activities to encourage the child's creativity include knitting, latchhook rugmaking, making Christmas ornaments, making collages, starting an indoor garden, making puppets, and making paper-mache heads. Responsibility can be encouraged by organizing the house more efficiently to encourage self-care skills. Also included in the newsletter are brief do's and don'ts, a description of the Lekotek toy lending library system, and suggestions for using leisure time adaptively. (DB)

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Special Parent ★Special Child

Practical pointers for parenting handicapped children

VOL. 4, NO. 4 JULY/AUGUST 1988

SUMMER-TIME FUN AND LEARNING

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Linda Murphy

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The closing of school for summer recess usually brings mingled feelings of relief and dismay to special families. On one hand, parents are freed from hectic school year schedules while, on the other, they find themselves faced with endless vacant summer days seeking ways to keep their special child entertained. Free time for the special youngster seems to elicit disorganization and restlessness; the misbehaviors of the special child who is unable to amuse himself can, unfortunately, ruin the summer for everyone. Here's how you can provide a summer of **fun and learning** for your special child without straining your budget or expending undue effort. By selecting appropriate activities you can create a home environment where your special child can be encouraged to invent and discover.

Encourage reading activities

One of the things you can do over the summer with your special child is to encourage reading. Aside from making sure your child has appropriate books, picture books, magazines, even comics, make sure you do some reading yourself. Talk about an interesting article you have read in the local newspaper, share information about a magazine or book you are reading. Bring up these topics as a natural part of dinner table conversation. Children imitate what they see and hear, so set aside time when your special child can read or look at picture books side by side with you.

Observe your special child to find out if he has specific interests. Perhaps you can help him fill out a **magazine subscription** geared to

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

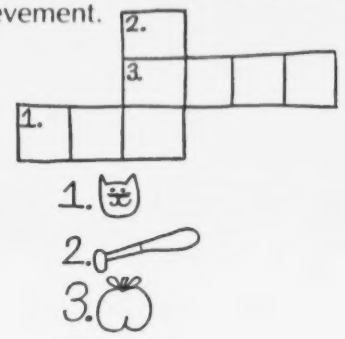
Linda Murphy, M.S., is the founder and for the past 15 years has been the director of a widely known, approved school for mentally handicapped children serving children ages 5-21 in Westchester County, NY, and surrounding areas. A lecturer, teacher and administrator, she is a foster parent and the parent of a handicapped child, too.

Suzanne Della Corte, M.S., for 15 Years co-director of the school, is responsible for curricula, staff development and supervision. She is author of numerous research projects in the field and has edited psychology textbooks for a leading New York publisher.

his interests and reading ability. Your local librarian or your child's teacher should be able to make some suggestions. Remember that all children love to receive mail and your special child will gain much pleasure when his own subscription magazine or children's book-of-the-month selection arrives addressed to him.

Visit your library and help him select books. Perhaps there is a story hour at the library your special youngster might be interested in. Comic books or joke books or word-finding magazines are good supplements so take your special youngster to the local stationery store to replenish his supply. Start a chart and mark down the titles of every book your special child has read or listened to this summer. You might want to give him an award or a treat when he completes a book.

Read out loud. Keep reading periods short. Stop before your youngster's interest flags so he will look forward to more. Many books are on tape cassettes or you can borrow talking books from the library. The ability to follow the story on tape while looking at the book sharpens listening skills—a very important factor for academic achievement.



Television or VCR viewing can become productive if it is paired with children's literature. This could include watching TV programs such as "Little House on the Prairie" or "Mr. Rogers" or "Sesame Street" for younger viewers. Renting tapes of such films as "The Wizard of Oz," "The Black Stallion" and "Swiss Family Robinson," for example, are all good introductions to books. Perhaps seeing the film will spark an interest in listening to the story.

Respond to your special child's inquiries of "why" or "how come" by looking things up with him in books or dictionaries. Even simple requests for snacks can be turned into a reading activity if you read the recipes together. The instructions for making popcorn, pancakes or Jello® are good examples.

Crossword puzzles and games are available geared to various reading abilities. It's important to make sure that your special child is able to master the rules of games or he will frustrate easily. Examples of games that involve reading include Junior Scrabble®, Trivial Pursuit-Young Player Edition®, Wheel of Fortune®, Monopoly®, Sorry®, Boggle® and Word

ABOUT SPECIAL PARENT/SPECIAL CHILD:

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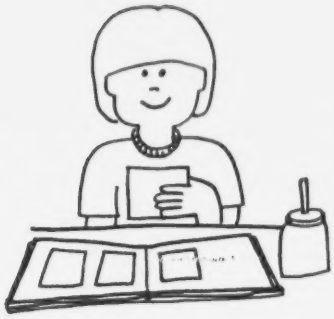


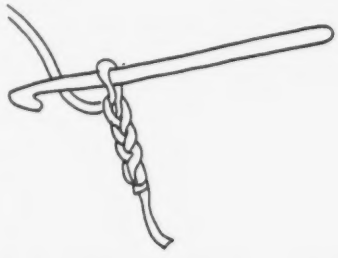
Yahtzee®. It's fun to discover your own favorites.

Make your own book. Choose a topic that interests your special child and help him make up his own story. Help him cut out pictures or clip newspaper or magazine articles that relate to the subject matter. Make a family history by collecting snapshots of each family member. Interview the family and have them write down a short biography. Read this out loud or have your special child read it if he can. Keep a log of any vacations or day trips or outings you take this summer. Have snapshots or Polaroids® of the event pasted in a scrapbook along with a short paragraph describing the event. Your special child can read and reread these books to commemorate the event.

Encourage letter writing. Grandparents or other relatives are ideal choices of people who would love to receive and send mail.

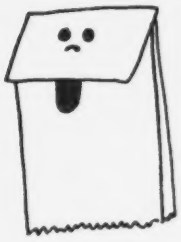
The special child who is encouraged to read and who gradually is able to select and enjoy his own reading material gains not only in independent behavior but also increases his likelihood of overall school success.

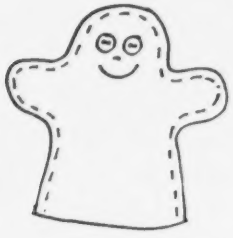
Encourage your child's creativity



Creative activities usually involve a finished product—this could be anything your special child has colored, painted, sewn together or made with his own hands. The sense of accomplishment your child feels when he is able to create something is well worth the initial effort it takes to teach him how. Chances are, once your special youngster has the method down pat, he will be able to pursue a variety of challenging, satisfying activities without being totally dependent on you to supervise him. This independence in itself is invaluable as is the added benefit of knowing that if your special child's hands are busy, his mind is developing as well. Try any of the following activities or create your own list.

- Knitting, crocheting or sewing is a good do-it-together activity. Start with simple garter stitch scarves to knit or crochet a chain to begin with or stitch and stuff a pillow or bean bag.
- Latchhook rug kits are readily available, easy to do and an excellent rainy day activity. The finished product is generally so attractive that your special child will receive much genuine praise. Perhaps he can be encouraged to try one all on his own.
- Christmas ornament kits can be purchased at craft stores and are fun and easy to make.
- Collages can be made by cutting and pasting pictures from magazines. Objects such as twigs, scraps of fabric or cotton can be glued onto paper or canvas to make an interesting design. Dried beans of various colors and sizes glued to cardboard is another variation.
- Start an indoor garden. Save the seeds from an orange or lemon and plant them in potting soil. Stick toothpicks on either side of an avocado pit, suspend it in a glass of water and watch the roots





and plant grow. Purchase a basil or parsley plant, put it on a sunny windowsill and put your special child in charge of watering or cutting snips for salad dressings.

• Make a mobile by using a wire hanger as the base. Collect ordinary objects such as scraps of wood, kitchen utensils or cutout cardboard shapes and hang each from a different length of string.

• Fill a water pistol with colored water made from washable vegetable dyes or tempera paint. Hang a cloth or large sheet of paper outside and let your child spray his own version of modern art. Use several pistols with different colors for variety.

• Sketch the outline of your child's body as he lies flat on a large piece of brown paper. Have him fill in the details by letting him paste on real buttons, fabric for clothing, yarn for the hair.

• Paper plates can be decorated and made into masks, bonnets or flags.

• Papier-maché is easy to make by first cutting or tearing newspaper into narrow strips and then dipping each strip into a paste made from flour and water mixed together. Blow up a balloon and experiment with using it as a base for making a face or mask. Layer each newspaper strip dampened with the paste over the balloon until it is covered. Let dry overnight and then decorate the face with paint, yarn for hair, etc.

• Puppets can be fashioned from paper bags. Sketch or trace faces, animals or nursery rhyme characters on the flattened paper bag. Stuff the bag with newspaper and secure the paper bag to a broomstick with tape or string. Your special child can create his own hand puppets by drawing or painting faces on a clean white sock.

• Egg cartons can be cut apart and painted to look like flowers. Pipe cleaners can be used for stems.

• Plastic straws of various colors can be cut up and strung together as necklaces or bracelets.

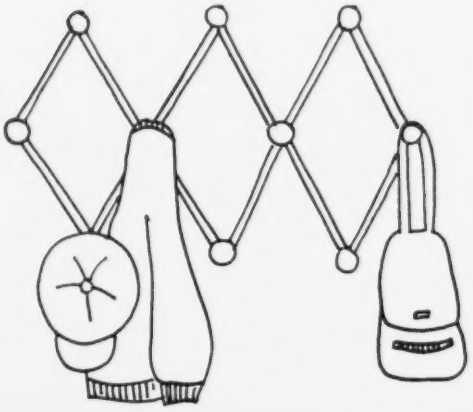
If arts and crafts activities begin to pall, try some of these musical activities, for example:

• Kazoos are inexpensive; they make delightful sounds if your child can be shown how to hum into one.

• Tonettes are simple plastic instruments that are relatively easy to master.

• Fill glasses with varying levels of water and show your special child how to tap on each glass with a spoon. Each glass makes a different sound and your child should enjoy creating his own melodies.

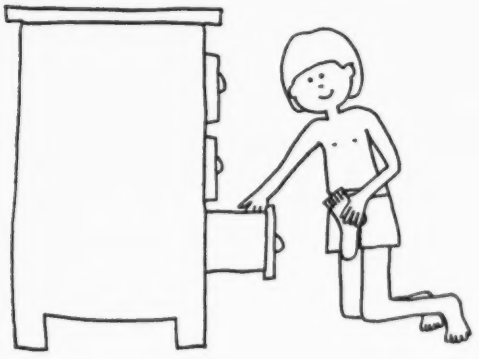
Encourage responsibility



Part of any child's growth towards independence is his ability to say with self-pride, "Look! I did it myself." Parents of special children often assume that their special youngster is incapable of doing many things on his own and so inadvertently rob him of the self-esteem that comes from being responsible for his own care. The less-pressured summer months are

a good time to devote to helping your special child acquire some basic self-care habits.

Organizing your house more efficiently will make the task of fostering independent skills in your special child much easier. For example, put shelves in the family room or in your child's bedroom at **his eye level.** This will help him to put his possessions away.



• Plastic crates that are color-coded can be placed on the floor or on low shelves. They are excellent for teaching a child how to put toys in one colored crate, for example, games in another, books in yet another.

• Develop a system for closets and drawers. Make sure there are easy-to-reach hooks and lowered closet poles in your child's closets. Hanging up clothes will become less frustrating for him if he can reach the hooks with less effort. Check to see if the drawers in his bureau are easy to pull open and shut. Make sure clothing is in drawers that are convenient for him to use.

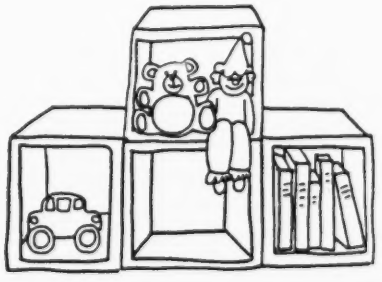
• A conveniently-placed clothes hamper in his room will make discarding soiled clothes a much easier chore.

• A low mirror and toothbrush and other toiletries on a reachable shelf in the bathroom make good grooming a pleasure, not a hassle.

• Have all snacks for your special child on one easy-to-reach shelf in the refrigerator. This will encourage him to get things himself.

Only the special parent is aware of his own child's unique needs. Does your child, for example, have a physical coordination problem that prevents him from taking care of his toileting needs? Perhaps a bar he can hold onto strategically placed near the toilet will help. Put yourself in your child's place. Look at your house through your child's eyes. If you arrange your house so that your special child knows where things are and if items are kept within easy reach, he can be taught to find what he wants, put things away after he's done and in general become less dependent on his parents.

Of course it's much easier and less time consuming to do everything yourself, especially at first. Most special children need explicit directions and much repetition before self-help skills become a habit. It's well worth the effort, however, because the special child, like any other child, needs to experience the joy of doing things on his own.



Do's and don'ts

• **Do gear activities** to your child's level of understanding and ability. A child, for example, with impaired hand-eye coordination will probably ignore coloring or cutting activities because they are too frustrating for him but he might enjoy the simpler task of pasting precut objects.

• **Do assume your child is a can-do**—not a can't-do—individual and you will probably be pleasantly surprised. Assign him a daily chore he is capable of mastering and praise him for his efforts.

• **Don't redo your special youngster's tasks for him** no matter how haphazardly they are done as long as you are sure he has produced his best efforts. A wrinkled bedspread your child has laboriously pulled up on his own is an occasion for compliments, not a straightening up on your part. Going over and redoing things is belittling and will ultimately discourage your child from practicing to do better.

• **Do be sure to hang up** or display your special child's arts and crafts projects or any item he has made. Your genuine praise validates his endeavors and will encourage him to create more things.

• **Do keep all activities short.** Quit before your child becomes bored or restless. Make sure that each project results in a finished work and can be completed in a relatively short period of time. This will maintain his interest and increase his desire to participate. Lengthen the activities gradually.

• **Do enroll your special child** in some short-term activity such as a puppetry workshop or a swim class or computer class if he shows an interest. Make sure he is able to participate with success.

• **Do find time for yourself.** Every day needn't be devoted exclusively to your special child. Perhaps you can share babysitting chores with another parent or hire a babysitter. If you've gotten a break, you will return to your special child and family responsibilities with a refreshed outlook.

Lekotek: unique toy lending library that makes a difference

What is a Lekotek? Lekotek is a worldwide system of support for families with children who have handicaps or special needs. Lekotek is a made-up word in Swedish for play library.

What does Lekotek do? Lekotek models play and counsels parents on using play to help their child. Lekotek has extensive libraries of toys, therapeutic and electronic play materials and books for parents to borrow. Lekotek also designs and builds specialized materials and toys, operates a Preschool Mainstreaming Program and COMPUPLAY, a computer project for children at Lekotek and their families.

What is the value of Lekotek? Lekotek focuses on the child's ability, not on the disability. Lekotek helps families see how their special child is like other children and play is the key. Lekotek offers a unique system of family support.

Who can use Lekotek? Lekotek supports families with children with special needs. Lekotek Leaders see children with any kind of disability, from the mildly handicapped to the severely impaired. But they really see only two kinds of children—boys and girls.

Who staffs Lekotek? Lekoteks are staffed by certified Lekotek Leaders who have backgrounds in

therapeutic fields, special education or child development. Lekotek Leaders have completed a graduate level training clinic and an intensive internship.

How does Lekotek work? Family visits are made by appointment. After an initial visit with the parents, the Lekotek Leader then meets with the parents and child at the Lekotek. Families visit the center monthly and see the same Leader each time. At Lekotek play strategies are expertly modeled for parents in a relaxed, cheerful setting by specially trained Lekotek Leaders. Selecting from among a vast inventory of both conventional and unique toys and materials, the Leader skillfully demonstrates how to capture the child's attention and engage him or her in meaningful interactions.

At first parents observe the process. Soon they begin to join in until they feel competent to continue the activity at home. At the end of each session, the family takes home several toys to use during the month on a lending library basis. Leaders and parents become partners in a play-to-learn program that benefits everyone.

The local Lekotek serves as a comprehensive resource and coordinates plans with the child's school or treatment center.

Where are Lekoteks? The Lekotek concept has been successfully adapted in over 30 countries. The National Lekotek Center in Evanston, Illinois, was the first Lekotek in the United States. The Lekotek network is growing rapidly and there are now over 40 centers throughout the United States.

For more information on Lekotek Centers in your area contact:

Linda Foster
National Lekotek Center
2100 Ridge Avenue
Evanston, IL 60204
(312) 328-0001

PSYCHOLOGIST'S CORNER:

Using leisure time adaptively

by George Popper, Ph. D.

While summer is a time for fun and relaxation, it is also a time for learning and exploration. Many skills children acquire during the summer can last a lifetime and certainly affect how well a child does in school once the summer has ended. Here are a few suggestions to help make the summer a meaningful and rewarding adventure for both you and your family.

1. Plan ahead. Although this sounds obvious, many people fail to plan far enough ahead of time or even to make realistic plans at all. Special children (and their parents) function best when there are guidelines and a structure to follow. Behavioral problems are more likely to occur when a child has little to do. Parents need not feel it is their responsiblity to "entertain" their child, but they do have an obligation to provide plans and activities so children can play on their own with a minimum of supervision.

2. Learning how to play with other children is as important as learning how to read or write. Summer, with its relaxed pace and more opportunities for recreation, is the ideal time to learn this skill. For the special child who has difficulty socializing, however, varying amounts of adult supervision will be needed. Sometimes organized recreation programs for special

children are provided by school districts, ARCs or other non-profit organizations. All children need to be with peers and special youngsters are no exceptions.

3. In addition to being fun, sports provide an avenue for many important learning opportunities. Your special child can begin learning basic rules—for instance, the object of the game is to get the ball in the basket—and progress to more complex rules as he is ready to learn them. Keeping score is a fun way to learn counting and number skills. The social aspects of sports involve learning to wait your turn and how to be a good sport. Winning, while it is nice, should not be the focus of any sports activity.

4. Arts and crafts provide a number of opportunities including learning how to use simple hand-tools, how to concentrate on a task, how to complete something you've started and improving eye-hand coordination and finger dexterity. The instructions accompanying models, for example, can be used to improve reading skills and sequential thinking in a way that is meaningful and rewarding to the special child.

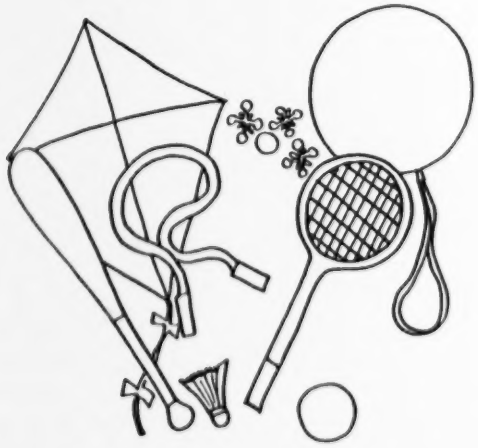
When adults work with special children on a detailed project, there is sometimes a tendency to become overly critical of the child's clumsy efforts. Praise and liberal positive reinforcement are better ways to encourage the child to continue trying. Possibly, the special child's interest in a summer project could develop into a gratifying hobby. As the youngster's skills improve, more involved projects could be selected and less supervision given. However, the praise for the child's efforts should remain sincere and constant.

5. Nature walks, visits to the seashore or trips to new and interesting places can be activities of fascination and wonder for all children regardless of their functional level or disability. A walk in the woods need not become an endless discourse on biology. Often, just looking at the different shapes and colors of leaves or discovering woodland sounds can provide the kind of stimulation and pleasure that even we adults sometimes forget.

Above all, remember that children learn when they are allowed to do so and when an environment conducive to learning is provided. They need time to explore on their own, but they also need guidance and help.

OF INTEREST TO PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

The University of Michigan Medical School is presenting a conference on "Sexual Exploitation of Persons with Disabilities," September 26 and 27, 1988, at the Michigan League, Ann Arbor, MI. This conference will discuss increased frequency and awareness of exploitation and focus on prevention and information. To find out more, contact Gayle Fox, Towsley Center, Box 0201, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor MI 48109/1-800-962-3555.



Illustrations by Leah Spring